



When You Hit the Proverbial Block....

By Chris Casteel

It's a bit ironic that the topic of the article is about hitting a block in choreography, because I have definitely hit a bit of a writing block as of late. So, hopefully this article will inspire instructors as well as this author.

First things first...realize that blocks are inevitable, and you are going to hit them at one point or another. Whether you are a veteran or a novice choreographer, you are bound to hit a dry spell. It is how you respond and what you do in those dry spells that will make the difference between giving in to them or conquering them. There is a saying that says... *Great choreography comes from great inspiration. You have nothing if you are not inspired.* The reality is, without inspiration the road to exceptional choreography is bumping to say the least. It is so important to find a muse from which to draw your inspiration.

Hopefully you can extract something from the list below to help you find that inspiration.

1. Place Yourself Into an Overload of Dance and Art.

Watch as much choreography as you can. Thankfully, we live at a time when Dance seems to be taking prime time television by storm. In addition, YouTube is great for this type of viewing. Just type in 'Winter Guard' and up pops a plethora of amazing inspiration.

However, beyond that, embrace as many genres of art as you can. Attend exhibits, plays, dance company performances, opera, concerts, street festivals; basically attend as many events that will cause you to change your perspective or illicit inspiration as you possibly can. By the way, if you live in an area that the arts are not as prevalent...go online and purchase DVDs. One of my favorites is the *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater* DVDs. Whatever the case, your options are really endless online.

2. Take in the World Around You.

It seems that at times we stretch our imaginations to their very limits in an effort to create something that is individualistic or unique. Don't get me wrong...those creative performances are absolutely wonderful. However, there have also been amazing color guard performances that deal with the simple things that exist in the world around us or that occur in everyday life. So start paying attention to the world around you. When you least expect it, something from your everyday world could catch your eye. It could be anything from children playing on a playground, to being stuck in rush hour traffic, to picking flowers in a field. Think about this statement for a moment...A choreography block is not in your mind...it is in your eyes – open them up to drink in the inspiration!

I would guess that if we are speaking of the world around you, then we should probably touch on feelings and emotions. This is my favorite way of hurdling those road blocks. Connect with your own life experiences to bring out moments of choreography that are uniquely you. In that way, the movement is distinctively yours, and when it means something personal...that is when you truly will become vested in the process.

3. Watch out for Stress...It's a Drain on Creativity.

Listen, I know there is a significant amount of stress on many of you at a most inopportune time in the season. What with costume design/sizing/ordering, charting, fundraising, staff dynamics and program logistics, there is no doubt that at the time when you need to be most creative, there is an enormous element of stress involved. Prioritize as much as you can to clear your plate of responsibility. You want to get rid of as many looming tasks on your horizon as you possibly can. Lastly, watch out for fatigue, because it is a real creativity zapper. Get some sleep.

4. Take a Break and Breathe!

Take some time out of the craziness for some introspection. Solitude is not necessarily a bad thing for the creative mind. In fact, being in a quiet place and simply listening to your thoughts can lead to inspiration. Take a step away from the process and really get quiet with it. I guess one could liken a block to something similar to running out of gas in your car...once that happens; you can't force it to continue running. You need to take a break and refuel your creative soul.

OK, so that is it. I guess I made it through my writing block! One last thing... Great choreography is an instinct that comes from the inside. It blends the vision of the routine with the authentic soul of the choreographer. The soul of the choreographer is built by his or her emotional responses to all life's experiences through their unique perspective. To seek truth in all experiences helps you relate and when you can do that, you can be inspired. That is where truly great choreography comes.